

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
Prepared by Two Roads Consulting  
2008

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Contents

Background/Methodology

Summary/Conclusions

- African Americans
- Somalis

Findings

- African Americans
  - Single Family Dwelling
  - Apartment Dwelling
- Somalis
  - Single Family Dwelling
  - Apartment Dwelling

Future Focus Groups – Learning and Recommendations

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
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2008

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#### Background/Methodology

Two Roads Consulting was retained by Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) Solid Waste Division to conduct focus groups within historically underserved communities. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain feedback on marketing material to be used to introduce new solid waste services in March 2009. The feedback will aid SPU to improve overall customer service, and to utilize more effective and culturally competent marketing methods in 2009.

Two Roads Consulting was responsible for two communities: African American and Somali (East African). From each community, both single-family units and renters would be selected – for a total of four different demographic focus groups. Each group was conducted at Garfield Community Center, a convenient location for the population, for 2 hours, November 14, 18, 19, and 21. SPU Solid Waste staff observed two of the groups.

Recruiting – The goal was to recruit 10 participants for each group. Actual participation was as follows:

|                                     | Goal | Actual |
|-------------------------------------|------|--------|
| African American/Single Family Unit | 10   | 8      |
| African American/Apartment Dwelling | 10   | 10     |
| Somali/Single Family Unit           | 10   | 4      |
| Somali/Apartment Dwelling           | 10   | 14     |
| Total                               | 40   | 36     |

Participants were paid a stipend of \$75 each.

Marketing materials presented for feedback included:

- Bus Ads – Text only & Graphics with Text
- “Monday” day of pick up tag
- Curbside Newsletter
- Where Does it Go
- Collection Calendar

In addition, participants were probed to get their attitudes toward a service change, rates, and understanding of the change after viewing all SPU materials.

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
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2008

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## Summary/Conclusions

### African Americans:

Participants are generally willing to do what will be required to increase recycling—to do the “right thing” to reduce waste. Concerns about keeping food waste in the house were expressed. Many don’t have space for an additional container, particularly apartment dwellers. Even those who have the space are concerned about food smells and fruit flies.

There is general confusion about the cans. *Will we get all new cans? What size can does my family need for each of the 3 pick-ups? How will I know if I need a smaller garbage can? Will all their cans be the new black as shown? What happens to my old can?*

Rate increases are a concern for everyone. People don’t want to pay more and aren’t sure they will be able to evaluate the difference unless they keep their old bills and compare when the new bills arrive. Some are willing to consider self-composting to save money but they don’t understand what’s involved.

The bus ads were not a big hit. Most people wanted more information—a website address was strongly suggested as an ad on. The graphics were not as attractive or compelling as folks would like to see.

Participants found it all a bit overwhelming—too much to digest. They are impressed that more things can be recycled and not pre-sorted. Visual examples are appreciated. They understand that the changes are mandatory, but they are not clear about the consequences for non-compliance.

### Somalis:

The idea of change and doing more for the environment resonated well with the Somali groups. While they liked the idea, there is some reluctance and skepticism around their ability to execute all that is being asked of them. Three out of the four single-family dwellers don’t subscribe to yard waste. None of the participants seemed particularly interested in separating their food waste. The single-family dwellers in particular felt that the food waste did not belong in the yard waste. Many Somalis talked about already separating their “wet” garbage from the “dry” so they could take the “wet” out more often. When it comes to recycling, they like ideas that simplified the in-house chore of separating recyclables. Those with young children felt it was already a challenge to get their kids to put everything in the proper bin.

Regardless of English language skills, the Somalis universally responded more to pictures than text. The garbage can/dumpster stickers went over very well because they felt it was a clear depiction of what should go in each can. Meanwhile, the text on the newsletter was overwhelming. On an unaided basis, none of the participants in the

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
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2008

---

apartment group even read the Curbside newsletter. They tended to gravitate immediately to the pages with pictures.

Among the Somalis there were a few anecdotal stories of people being fined for putting things in the wrong bin. Some were aware of these stories and others seemed to simply share the concern that they avoid a situation where they are fined.

The Somalis didn't always understand the distinctions on why certain items were placed in the categories they were on the "Where Does it Go?" piece. The pictures don't always convey subtleties that were attempted with words. Two examples are the paper bag in the food waste category (doesn't appear soiled) and the food packaging in the garbage category (don't appear empty). Also, there was a lot of confusion over why SPU would suggest throwing items away that they are used to donating (like clothes & sofas).

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
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2008

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## Findings

### African Americans - Single Family Dwelling

#### **Initial Attitude Toward Service Changes**

Concerns expressed:

- *What kinds of changes and why?*
- *Will my bill increase?*
- *What were doing now is fine.*
- *Is it going to be more difficult and complicated or more user-friendly?*

#### **Ad Concept Testing**

Text Only – preferred text was “Recycling. Reinvented.” Second most preferred was “Small is the new big.”

Graphic Ad – Most preferred ad was Concept #6 “Recycling. Reinvented.” Showing a selection of recyclable items. Second most preferred was #10 “Recycling. A new day. A new way.” This one sounded fresh and modern (like an “Obama-ism”).

After seeing graphics with text, participants did not change their choice of preferred text.

#### **Bus Ads with Graphics**

|    | <b>Ad Copy (Design)</b>   | <b>Comments</b>   |
|----|---|---|
| 1  | Quieter trucks. More pickups. Recycle more paper, plastic, food & metal     | Trucks, more pickups suggest more money<br>Graphics uninteresting<br>Words well laid out              |
| 2  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Cart & Truck)                                       | Date read well  |
| 3  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Soda cans)  | Didn't understand the meaning of the cans   |
| 4  | Better recycling is on the horizon.   | Eye-catching, “Human touch.”<br>Scary, creepy. Catchy.  |
| 5  | Recycling. A new day. A new way. (Blue background with white truck outline) | Truck is cute but words are boring<br>Some would prefer different picture- e.g. flowers (going green) |
| 6  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Recyclable items)                                   | Some liked seeing all the items.<br>Some found it too busy, distracting                               |
| 7  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Corrugated background)                              | No one preferred.<br>Not attractive or catchy enough.<br>Confused – what is the ad about?             |
| 8  | Small is the new big (Bag & Cart)   | Confusion about the plastic bag—are we switching over to using plastic bags instead of bins?          |
| 9  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Green background, text only)                        | Quick, to the point   |
| 10 | Recycling. A new day. A new way. (Green background; truck in white)         | Truck stands out on green background<br>Green = recycling   |

#### **Notification Process**

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
Prepared by Two Roads Consulting  
2008

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Additional media suggested was black radio stations and newspapers (e.g. The Facts) as well as television and Internet ads. Automated phone calls were suggested (mixed reactions to that) and text messages.

**Understanding of Service Changes:      Curb Waste & Conserve Newsletter, Collection Calendar piece, Day of Week Sticker, Labels for Carts, Where Does It Go piece**

All of the printed materials were helpful, particularly the pictures. The most useful piece was the Collection Calendar. There was desire expressed for a smaller, piece that could be posted on the refrigerator. People really like the labels for the cans to help remember what goes where. Participants found it all a bit overwhelming—too much to digest. They are impressed that more things can be recycled and not pre-sorted. Visual examples are appreciated. They understand that the changes are mandatory, but they are not clear about the consequences for non-compliance.

The mail pieces need to clearly say “READ THIS! NEW RECYCLING PLAN!!” Otherwise, people will throw them in the recycling without reading.

There was confusion about pick-up weeks (food/yard waste every week, recycling every other week) and size of can needed by household.

**Food and Yard Waste -      Name Ranking**

- Food and Yard Waste Collection is preferred term
- Also suggested “Food and Yard Waste for Composting”

**Rates**

- Groups was concerned about rates going up and confused about what they currently pay versus what the new rates will be. They couldn't really evaluate the “value” of the new service relative to the cost. *What are the savings/benefits to this program?*

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
Prepared by Two Roads Consulting  
2008

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## Findings

### African Americans - Apartment Dwelling

#### **Initial Attitudes Toward Service Changes**

Apartment dwellers had the same reactions as single-family group.

- *What kinds of changes and why?*
- *Will my bill increase? Will money be saved?*
- *Will it be easier?*
- *Are we going to have to separate like the people in homes do?*
- *Are their fines/consequences for not following the rules? How will they police it?*

#### **Ad Concept Testing**

Text Only – preferred text was “Quieter trucks. More pickups. Recycle more paper, plastic, food & metal.” Second most preferred was “Recycling. A new day. A new way.”

Graphic Ads – Most preferred ad was “Quieter trucks...” (concept #1). Second most preferred was “Recycling. Reinvented” (concept #2). The “Horizon” ad was better received with the graphic.

#### **Bus Ads with Graphics**

|   | <b>Ad Copy (Design)</b>   | <b>Comments</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | Quieter trucks. More pickups. Recycle more paper, plastic, food & metal.    | Lots of information. Adds food & metal. Like the idea of quieter trucks—too noisy. Sounds more efficient. Not enough visual.<br>(3) picked as their favorite                 |
| 2 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Cart & Truck)                                       | Direct. Specific to the issue. Anyone can understand. Truck & trash can make sense<br>(2) picked as their favorite   |
| 3 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Soda cans, White background)                        | Looks like DNA strands. Or recycling art<br>(1) picked as their favorite   |
| 4 | Better recycling is on the horizon.   | Dull. Dumb. Not appealing. What horizon? Cute. Curious about what he is looking at.  |
| 5 | Recycling. A new day. A new way. (White background with blue truck)         | Memorable. Catchy. Like the words. Right to the point. Would like to see animated characters on this one. “NEW DAY” implies future for kids.<br>(1) picked as their favorite |
| 6 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Recyclable items)                                   | Too much clutter. Like real items shown.   |
| 7 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Green background, text only)                        |  |
| 8 | Better recycling coming March 30. (Animated recyclables on blue background) | Looks too animated. Eye-catching. Good for kids.   |

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
Prepared by Two Roads Consulting  
2008

---

|   |   |                              |
|---|---|------------------------------|
|   |   | (2) picked as their favorite |
| 9 | Seattle Recycling. It's Getting Even Better.<br>New pick-up days begin March 30 <sup>th</sup> . | (1) picked as their favorite |

**Notification Process**

Participants really like the idea of radio ads ( 7 out of 10 people). Television news commercials, the Internet and mail were also suggested. Five out of 10 currently receive and read the recycling newsletters.

**Understanding of Service Changes: Where Does It Go piece**

The "Where Does It Go" piece was well received. Actually showing pictures was very positive versus using lots of words. There is still confusion about which plastic containers are recyclable. They liked the idea of food and yard waste collection. They want SPU to make the landlords create more places (e.g. on each floor) for recycling containers—more accessibility. Also suggested color-coding the containers so it is easy to remember which one to use.

Some felt that there is too much instruction (e.g. layering shredded paper, bundling plastic bags together) and too much to do. Not simple enough.

**Other**

- Need to offer a free or paid service to recycle light bulbs and provide special bags.
- Need more compact size bags for apartment dwellers. Space is a premium and there is not room for additional containers in the kitchen. Many don't have garbage disposals.
- Offer incentives for apartment building owners to get in compliance.
- More reminders as the date approaches.



Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
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2008

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Findings

Somalis – Single Family Dwelling

**Initial Attitudes Toward Service Changes**

Concerns expressed:

- *What kinds of changes and why?*
- *Will I be notified of all the changes?*
- *Will the schedule be changing?*

**Ad Concept Testing**

Text Only – preferred text was “Quieter trucks. More pickups. Recycle more paper, plastic, food & metal.” Second most preferred was “Recycling. A new day. A new way. Better recycling comes to Seattle March 30.”

Graphic Ad – Most preferred ad was Concept #1 “Quieter trucks. More pickups. Recycle more paper, plastic, food & metal.” They particularly liked the idea of more pickups because they feel their garbage is overflowing now. They felt this concept said everything that needed to be said clearly. More recycling is better for the environment and they want to keep plastic out of the trash.

After seeing graphics with text, participants did not change their choice of preferred text.

**Bus Ads with Graphics**

|   | <b>Ad Copy (Design)</b>   | <b>Comments</b>   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Quieter trucks. More pickups. Recycle more paper, plastic, food & metal     | Trucks, more pickups were interpreted to be about garbage, not yard waste<br>Quieter trucks seem like a good idea, but one person joked about not having the last minute warning of hearing the trucks as a reminder to take the garbage out<br>Better for the environment<br>Like the image of the truck<br>(2) picked as their favorite |
| 2 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Cart & Truck)                                       | Limited details   |
| 3 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Soda cans)  | Didn't understand the meaning of the cans   |
| 4 | Better recycling is on the horizon.   | Limited details   |
| 5 | Recycling. A new day. A new way. (Blue background with white truck outline) | Like the truck image.<br>Like the words, change is good (Obama)   |
| 6 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Recyclable items)                                   | Some liked seeing all the items.<br>(1) person picked as their favorite   |
| 7 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Corrugated background)                              | Limited details   |
| 8 | Small is the new big (Bag & Cart)   | Confusion about the plastic bag—are we switching over to using plastic bags instead of bins?<br>One person liked the concept of “shrinking” the garbage<br>(1) per picked as their favorite   |
| 9 | Recycling. Reinvented. (Green background, text                              | Limited details   |

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
Prepared by Two Roads Consulting  
2008

---

|    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
|    | only)   |   |
| 10 | Recycling. A new day. A new way. (Green background; truck in white) | Like the truck image.<br>Like the words, change is good (Obama) |

### **Notification Process**

Participants weren't sure if they would see the yellow date stickers pasted on their cans. What if it blows off? What if you are rushing in the cold & don't pay attention?

All four said local television news was the best way to reach them. Also they felt posting notices in community centers would be effective. They would like phone calls & messages as well. All felt that radio & newspaper would not reach them.

Generally they did not remember receiving recycling newsletters and did not read them.

When asked about how much notification before March 30<sup>th</sup> they would want about one month's notice for changes. They did state that the notification period would depend on things they weren't sure of at this point: do they need to order yard waste containers? are their collection dates changing?, etc.

### **Understanding of Service Changes: Curb Waste & Conserve Newsletter, Collection Calendar piece, Day of Week Sticker, Labels for Carts, Where Does It Go piece**

The labels for the carts were the most enthusiastically received. Participants like the pictures to convey what should go in each cart. They felt the other pieces should follow the design of communicating primarily through pictures versus words. They felt the primary panel on the newsletter was too wordy and confusing. They were more drawn to the internal pages of the newsletter which had more visuals to guide them.

While they liked the look of the collection calendar, it failed to convey some of the critical information. None of the participants could tell when garbage or yard waste collection was scheduled based on the calendar. They wanted the piece to highlight their own collection day. They found the holiday stars confusing. Again, they were relying on the visual calendar and not the words. Nowhere on the calendar is garbage/yard waste indicated.

Participants recalled receiving a "Where Does it Go?" piece and one said that is was currently posted on her refrigerator. None of them recalled receiving any newsletters from SPU.

There was confusion over what size can they have right now and what size can they think they would need with these changes. Two people thought they probably have a 32 gallon garbage can right now and two said 18 gallon. They were also uncertain about whether they would receive new cans with this change or if they would keep their current

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
Prepared by Two Roads Consulting  
2008

---

cans. They felt there should be some instruction on the rates/size panel that explains what they need to do concerning getting new cans.

**Food and Yard Waste - Name Ranking**

- Food/Yard Waste Collection is preferred term (4 out of 4 preferred)

**Rates**

Generally the group thought a \$4-5 monthly increase would be reasonable (one person thought only \$1 was warranted). Their estimates of what they are paying currently for garbage collection included \$54 every two months, \$200 every two months, \$250 every two months and one person couldn't venture a guess. They wondered if SPU would be lowering rates with the recent gas price reductions. They also felt SPU should have more low income assistance programs, similar to other utilities.

**Other**

This group was not interested at all in putting food waste in the yard waste container. They just felt they do not belong together. The concept involved too much separating and making extra trips to another can.

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
Prepared by Two Roads Consulting  
2008

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Somalis – Apartment Dwelling

**Initial Attitudes Toward Service Changes**

Concerns expressed:

- *What kinds of changes and why?*
- *Is this going to be too much work?*
- *Will it be organized for me to do the work?*
- *Are the changes because we want to better the environment?*

**Ad Concept Testing**

Text Only – preferred text was “Recycling. A new day. A new way. Better recycling comes to Seattle March 30.” (11 out of 14 picked this as their favorite)

Graphic Ad – The most preferred ad was Concept #5 “Recycling. A new day. A new way.” (6 out of 14 picked this as their favorite) They felt that “change is good” and that this signaled that something better for the environment was coming. They thought the phrase was catchy and that it reminded them of the new Obama administration.

**Bus Ads with Graphics**

|    | <b>Ad Copy (Design)</b>   | <b>Comments</b>   |
|----|---|---|
| 1  | Quieter trucks. More pickups. Recycle more paper, plastic, food & metal     | Trucks, more pickups were interpreted to be about garbage, not yard waste<br>Quieter trucks seem like a good idea, but one person joked about not having the last minute warning of hearing the trucks as a reminder to take the garbage out<br>Better for the environment<br>Like the image of the truck<br>(2) picked as their favorite |
| 2  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Cart & Truck)                                       | Limited details   |
| 3  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Soda cans)  | Didn't understand the meaning of the cans   |
| 4  | Better recycling is on the horizon.   | Limited details   |
| 5  | Recycling. A new day. A new way. (Blue background with white truck outline) | Like the truck image.<br>Like the words, change is good (Obama)<br>(6) picked as their favorite   |
| 6  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Recyclable items)                                   | Some liked seeing all the items.<br>(2) person picked as their favorite   |
| 7  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Corrugated background)                              | Limited details   |
| 8  | Small is the new big (Bag & Cart)   | Confusion about the plastic bag—are we switching over to using plastic bags instead of bins?<br>One person liked the concept of “shrinking” the garbage<br>(2) per picked as their favorite   |
| 9  | Recycling. Reinvented. (Green background, text only)                        | Limited details<br>(1) picked as their favorite   |
| 10 | Recycling. A new day. A new way. (Green background; truck in white)         | Like the truck image.<br>Like the words, change is good (Obama)<br>(1) picked as their favorite   |

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
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2008

---

**Notification Process**

12 out of 14 participants said bus ads would be a good way to reach them. All fourteen said local television news was an effective way to reach them. Only 3 said radio would be effective. They generally did not like to be bothered with phone calls & messages.

Generally they did not remember receiving recycling newsletters and did not read them.

When asked about how much notification before March 30<sup>th</sup> they would need they all said they would want some kind of advance warning, but there was no clarity on how much time was needed.

**Understanding of Service Changes: Curb Waste & Conserve Newsletter, Labels for Dumpsters, Where Does It Go piece**

The labels for the dumpsters were the most enthusiastically received. Participants like the pictures to convey what should go in each cart. They felt the other pieces should follow the design of communicating primarily through pictures versus words. This group was given the newsletter and ask to review on an unaided basis. None of the participants even looked at the [primary panel] until told to do so. Because of this they missed the “news” about what is changing and focused instead on the internal panels with pictures.

Some participants recalled receiving a “Where Does it Go?” piece and a few said that is was currently in their house and used as reference. None of them recalled receiving any newsletters from SPU.

**Other**

This group had a few participants that were concerned about being fined for not sorting their garbage/recycling correctly. They had heard stories about people being fined and they were worried about compliance.

Many in this group already separate their “wet” garbage from their “dry”. The “wet” garbage was taken out more often.

Quite a few felt there should be larger dumpsters or more pickups both for garbage and recycling.

## **Future Focus Groups – Learning and Recommendations**

### Ethnic Groups – Historically Underrepresented Populations

Participants enjoyed being part of affinity groups. They felt they had common lifestyles/eating styles that lead to shared thinking about how garbage and recycling are handled. All participants indicated they would be willing to participate in the future.

#### Somali Population

Recruiting – The Somali population is particularly challenging to locate and communicate with. They do not respond to the usual outreach approaches of posters, signs, emails or phone calls. This group requires face-to-face communication. They do not understand the concept of a “focus group” and therefore, it needs to be explained in terms they understand and are not afraid of. They are very responsive to telling their friends and family members once they are convinced and in that way can generate the numbers needed for a full group. As a result, it takes a lot longer to recruit and screen Somalis.

Moderation – Translators are needed for the Somali population due to language gaps and different interpretation. It would be preferable to have a translator that is not a participant so that they can concentrate on representing the opinions of others. The moderators guide was adjusted to eliminate the requests to write individual reactions to concepts given the language barrier.

Visuals – Recycling items need to be clear and take into consideration the use and interpretation by different cultures of food items in particular.

Quick fixes: Items found to be confusing

- Paper bag – the paper bag in the yard waste section looks clean and therefore seems to belong in recycling
- Food packaging – the Ore Ida potatoes package and the frozen peas package don't look used/empty. This raised the question of “why are they telling us to put peas in the garbage?” These packages need to look used/empty, similar to the potato chip bag
- Plastic shrink wrap – Universally the participants believed that plastic shrink wrap packaging was recyclable
- Candy wrappers – candy bar & other single serve snack wrappers were considered to be “foil” and therefore recyclable
- Clothes & furniture – there was confusion over why SPU would ask people to throw items that could be donated away. Many apartment dwellers said they leave bulky items next to the dumpsters for whoever might need them. They thought the chart indicated they should stop doing this
- Televisions – there is a picture of the exact same television in two different sections with two different numbers to call
- Batteries – these are listed in two sections and it wasn't clear why
- Paint can – confusion over why this isn't recyclable

Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste  
African American & Somali Focus Group Summary  
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2008

---

- Glassware - confusion over why this isn't recyclable or shouldn't be donated (perhaps show a broken glass)
- Pizza box – most thought this should be recyclable
- Shredded paper - confusion over why this isn't recyclable
- Metals – be more clear on which are recyclable
- Plastics – indicate which numbers are recyclable